

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke (18:18-27; Gal. 3:23-4:5)

+ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit +

There is nothing about us from our birth that keeps us from God. You can be born a Jew or a Gentile, be a slave or free, male or female. This is not to say that ethnicity, your social status, or your gender are unimportant. Those things are very much part of who we are. But in and of themselves these things do not keep us from God, nor do they bring us to Him for that matter.

What prevents us from Christ are those things we add to our lives, to our desire, and to our hearts. What keeps us from God are those things our lives become attached to; things other than God that become our desire, and that wall off our hearts.

This is why the disciples responded the way they did to the episode in today's Gospel. They said, "Who then can be saved?" Because while not all of them were rich, most of the Disciples for example were simple fisherman, nevertheless they understood the point: The rich ruler's problem was his desire for and attachment to something other than following Christ. And everyone is capable of this. Rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. Everyone falls to the temptation and desire of becoming attached to the things of this world.

If we seek to truly know God, to be faithful to the depth of His commandments, then we cannot be attached to the things of this world. Whoever is attached to the things of this world, however small these things may be, cannot come to the knowledge of God. But the renunciation of material things, worldly attitudes, and ways of living, will bring us to God.¹

One of the ways you can catch a monkey is by putting food or some object of the monkey's desire in a hole. The monkey sticks his hand in and grabs the object in his fist gets it stuck, because he refuses to let go the object. If he doesn't let go he will die that like. So it is with us. Unless we are spiritually smarter than the monkey we will get our hearts stuck with something other than God- Anger, pride, resentment, lust, power, fear, gluttony, or whatever- and we will be dead to God.

In the case of the rich ruler the attachment was with wealth. He didn't want to give it up even when salvation was on the line. Yes, he was an outwardly pious man. He knew the commandments and even followed them. Jesus doesn't lessen the commandments. Instead He adds to them. He doesn't just want us to follow the commandments and be "good people, no, He wants us to be perfect.

The Law of Moses, the Torah, is good and holy. It is meant to lead us to the Christ who calls us to follow Him even further into perfection; into His very life. And for us this means true poverty. True poverty is to be unburdened of the pleasures of the world, without anxious desire for the things of this temporal world.ⁱⁱ True poverty is the laying aside of all earthly care, be it wealth, pride, jealousy, sloth pleasure of the flesh, whatever keeps us from going through the eye of the needle, whatever keeps us from entering in by the narrow gate, that we might receive the King of all.

And to do this, to lay aside all earthly care, we have tools. We have the mindfulness of death, the remembrance of the hour of our death, and the fear of God. By these things our hearts are crushed and humbled. By these things we demolish the walls we have built around our hearts like barnacles to a ship. And this allows the Grace of God to enter in.ⁱⁱⁱ It allows love to come out. And so we can only love, we can only know God, in accordance with measure in which we crucify our hearts daily.

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ⁱ St. Symeon The New Theologian, "Practical and Theological Texts," #4-5. *The Philokalia*, v. 4, p. 26

ⁱⁱ Inspired by St. John Climacus' *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Archimandrite Zacharias' *The Hidden Man of the Heart*, p. 46-47